
IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO RECRUITING AND RETAINING A DIVERSE TEACHER WORKFORCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A diverse teacher workforce has the potential to improve outcomes for all students, and especially for students of color. North Carolina has recognized the importance of increasing diversity in the workforce and despite national and local efforts from school districts and policy makers, the teaching workforce has remained largely white and female, even as the students they serve have become increasingly diverse, widening the racial gap between teachers and students (Mitchell, 2019). According to national data, people of color make up only 20 percent of the teaching force, while 51 percent of U.S. public school students come from non-white racial or ethnic groups (Frey, 2020).

Teacher diversity matters. Hiring and retaining non-white teachers positively impacts multiple K-12 outcomes for all students, but especially for students of color. Studies show that for Black and Hispanic students, test scores improve for math and reading in early grades when they are taught by teachers of the same race. Students are also less likely to face exclusionary discipline practices and are more likely to attain a postsecondary degree (DRIVE Task Force, 2021). Additionally, Gershenson and colleagues (2021), found that same-race teachers demonstrate a “role model” effect can last into adulthood and potentially shrink the educational attainment gap.

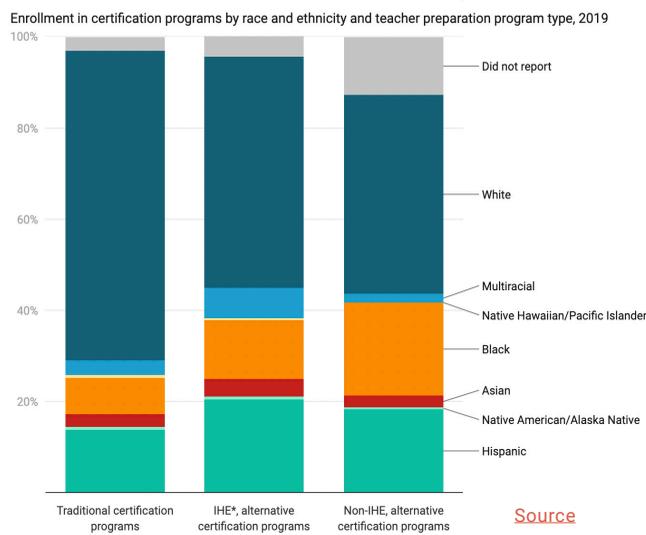
Although attempts have been made to increase the numbers of teachers of color, the nation’s public schools are far from reflecting the diversity of the student populations they serve (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019). Among many barriers that may contribute to this mismatch, this brief focuses on four areas: preparation, debt accumulation, completion, and retention. Specifically, 1) the disproportionately lower rates of Black and Hispanic candidates in college and traditional teacher preparation program as compared to their white counterparts, 2) the burden of student loan debt, 3) the barriers associated with gaining a license to teach which steers many Black students to alternate certification pathways, and 4) the working conditions that non-white teachers encounter which discourage them from staying in the profession. In essence, at every connection in the teacher pipeline, from postsecondary preparation to classroom teacher, people of color fall through the cracks. This brief seeks to draw attention to these barriers and make recommendations to policymakers to address these barriers in order to create and sustain a robust and diverse teacher workforce that reflects the diversity of the students it serves.



POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT

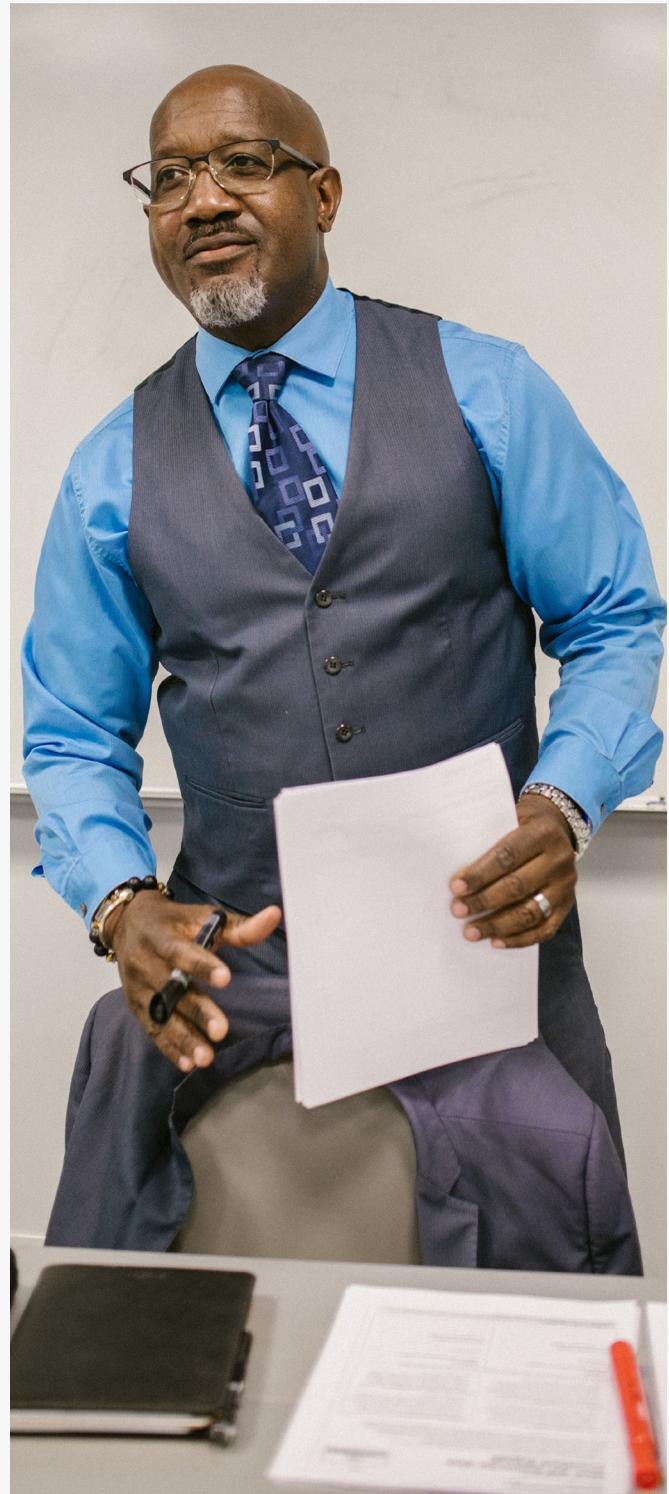
Would-be educators of color encounter their first barrier to entering the profession long before graduating from high school. Students of color are more likely to attend schools that are underfunded, low-performing, and staffed with less effective educators, resulting in students who are less likely to attend a postsecondary institution. Low college matriculations could also be due to the “role-model” effect (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2019), which states that teachers’ beliefs about a student’s college potential can become self-fulfilling prophecies. This study found that all teachers are overly optimistic about the college potential for all students; however, white teachers are systematically less optimistic about Black students, which may create a self-fulfilling prophecy that keeps Black children from considering college and further perpetuates racial achievement gaps.

Alternative certification programs enroll a larger share of students of color than traditional teacher preparation programs



*Institution of higher education.

Note: Enrollment totals in traditional and alternative, IHE programs includes enrollment in the outlying U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.





Even if students enroll in college, low-income and students of color tend to spend more time earning their degrees because they are more likely to have to take remedial classes (Flores, Clark, Claeys, & Villarreal, 2007). The extra time and tuition costs associated with remedial classes decreases the likelihood of college completion. For many highly qualified candidates, teaching lacks the prestige and earning potential of

other career opportunities available to them. The less desirable career path coupled with an adoption of negative associations of school environments during their K-12 education, often leads them to avoid a career in teaching altogether (Ocasio, 2014).

TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

A solution commonly employed are teacher pipelines that aim to put more teachers in classrooms. These teacher pipelines recruit candidates, some as early as high school, enroll them into a postsecondary institution, admit them and help them complete an Educator Preparation Program (EPP). The focus though is to generally increase the teacher workforce not to specifically increase educators of color.

While EPPs provide an avenue to increase the number of teachers, it falls short of increasing the number of teachers of color. Demographic trends within North Carolina's educator pipeline for the graduating high school class of 2012, indicate a 46 percent gap between potential teachers of color and candidates for color enrolling in EPPs (DRIVE Task Force, 2021). Further, EPPs tend to be comprised of predominately white students. In 2018, 86 percent of students who were licensed through a teacher recruitment program

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF TEACHER PREPARATION AT NORTH CAROLINA'S HISTORICALLY MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS

North Carolina is home to 11 accredited historically minority serving institutions (HMSIs). Ten of these schools have an approved EPP. These institutions have been a driving force in increasing access to postsecondary education and EPPs and account for nearly a third of the enrollment of all pre-service educators of color. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been the primary, and for most of North Carolina's history the only, conduit through which North Carolina's educators of color emerged. The institutional knowledge and resources that are available to students of color from these colleges and universities is critical to providing best practices to enhance preparation across all EPPs in the state.



at a postsecondary institution in North Carolina were white (Title II, 2018).

Every US state requires at least a bachelor’s degree to become certified to teach, regardless of the major. Consequently, having a degree can serve as a gateway into later opportunities to become a teacher through continuing education and/or an alternative pathway. Alternative certification programs allow professionals with degrees in non-teaching fields to become certified through a shorter but intensive training process. Alternative certification programs enroll a higher percentage of candidates of color, possibly because they feature benefits such as opportunities to receive a stipend, federal loan forgiveness and lower initial costs, which may be attractive to students of color who face a high student debt burden. Enrollment in alternative certification programs is also declining across racial groups, which is especially troubling since the profession already struggles to attract and retain teachers of color (Partelow, 2019). Unfortunately, certification programs overall produce 12 percent fewer graduates than programs in postsecondary institutions (DRIVE Task Force, 2021).

These trends for educator candidates of color to be underrepresented in preparation programs, albeit traditional or alternative, highlights an underlying issue of the systemic and institutional inequities that put aspiring educators of color at a disadvantage.

North Carolina has a dedicated pipeline to produce a more robust teacher workforce called the North Carolina Teaching Fellows. It offers scholarships for students to attend an approved university in North Carolina to attain a degree in education. The scholarship is in exchange for teaching in the state for four years. The program initially had the goal of giving 20 percent of the scholars to candidates of color; however, the program fell short and only had 17 percent of recipients who were non-white. In a relaunch of the program in 2017, the goal of using scholarships to target candidates of color, was replaced by a goal to recruit teachers into STEM and special education (Hinchcliffe, 2019b). The participants in the North



Carolina Teaching Fellows remains overwhelmingly white and female (Hinchcliffe, 2019a).

THE RISING COST OF STUDENT DEBT AND LOW EARNING POTENTIAL

The increasing burden of college debt is another hurdle in pursuing education careers. Student loan debt is much greater for Black and Hispanic students than for white students. Based on data from National Center for Education Statistics Baccalaureate and Beyond (2021), Black college graduates have about \$7,400 more debt than white graduates. However, four years post graduation, Black college graduates have more than \$25,000 more debt than white graduates. The gap more than quadruples with Black graduates owing \$43,000 more than white graduates over 12 years. Hispanic college students tend to borrow about as much as their white counterparts, but their loan default rates are about twice as high. This could indicate a lack of ability to pay back the student loan debt. High student loan debt out of postsecondary education and low earning potential are a double jeopardy on upward economic mobility. Given that many educators of color often lack generational wealth as compared to their white col-

leagues, they may face an uphill battle in paying back student loans.

GETTING CERTIFIED OR LICENSED

North Carolina leads the nation in National Board-certified teachers, yet educators of color are significantly underrepresented (DRIVE Task Force, 2021). Certification exams are frequently reported as a barrier to becoming a teacher. Many of the challenges arise from a lack of foundational knowledge and exposure to test-taking strategies (Wexler, 2019, National Center for Educator Quality, 2019), which can be traced back to the first barrier in the teacher pipeline process, poor K-12 experiences. Other challenges for aspiring educators of color for passing certification exams are the cost and potential bias that is embedded in the exams (Bennett, McWhorter, & Kuykendall, 2006; Petchauer, Bowe, & Wilson, 2018).

Aspiring teachers must pass (or place out of) the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators to enroll in an EPP and then pass the Praxis Subject Assessment to qualify for a license. Passing rates for Black and Hispanic candidates for certification lag behind their white peers (National center for Educator Quality, 2019). Black candidates are almost half as likely to

pass the elementary exams as their white peer and just over half of all Hispanic candidates earn a passing score.

TEACHER RETENTION

Even when candidates of color persist through an educator preparation program, pass the certification exam, and likely take on the crushing student loan debt, many of the schools that hire educators of color struggle to retain them. National studies of teacher retention indicate that around 20 to 30 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years, and that attrition is even higher (often reaching 50 percent or more) in high-poverty schools and in high-need subject areas (Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2016).

High Turnover

While there is a statistically significant difference in the overall turnover rates for teachers of color and white teachers, this does not hold true across school types. Teachers of color are overwhelmingly employed in public schools serving high proportions of students of color in urban communities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) analysis, among teachers working in high-poverty elementary and secondary schools, 63 percent were white, 16 percent were Black, and 17 percent were

Hispanic. In comparison, among teachers working in low-poverty schools, 92 percent were white, three percent were Hispanic, and three percent were Black. Progress in hiring teachers of color in high poverty schools does not necessarily equate to progress in retaining teachers of color; these schools are typically under-resourced and riddled with higher turnover rates for all teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2018). When teachers of color and white teachers work in schools with the same proportion of poverty demographics, their turnover rates are statistically indistinguishable. However, because teachers of color tend to work in schools with larger concentrations of high poverty, they are more likely to teach in schools with higher turnover rates.

Schools with high turnover rates often contend with a range of challenges, including accountability pressures and a lack of resources and support. Teachers citing a lack of administrative support, poor working conditions and an antagonistic school culture were more than twice as likely to leave their school or the teaching profession entirely (Ingersoll, May, & Collins, 2017). When giving specific context to the antagonistic school culture, Black and Hispanic teachers cited the burden of the “invisible tax” as a frequent cause of dissension between their white teacher counterparts and white administrators (Dixon, Griffin, and Teoh, 2019).





The “Invisible Tax”

The “invisible tax,” refers to the systemic pressures placed on teachers of color that may reflect cultural or ethnic stereotypes and may have to take on additional roles and responsibilities without additional compensation. Black teachers frequently reported facing racial discrimination and stereotyping in their schools, noting their white colleagues often did not respect their expertise as educators, and citing that they were often pigeonholed as disciplinarians. For some, that might mean they were assigned disciplinary roles instead of other leadership roles they might be more interested in, such as roles recognizing their content expertise. Or they might be criticized by school leaders or colleagues if they do not embody the disciplinarian persona expected of them. Teachers also reported that they felt obligated to take on additional responsibilities to support students of the same race who might not otherwise receive the support they needed.

Hispanic teachers reported feeling viewed as inferior to other teachers or only being beneficial for Hispanic students. They also reported receiving criticism from other teachers and school leaders when they embedded culturally relevant materials into their curricula or allowed or encouraged students to speak Spanish in the classroom. Many bilingual teachers discussed wanting to support their schools, students, and families by helping with translation but also described the added burden of being expected to do so, particularly without additional compensation (Griffin, 2018).

CONCLUSION

While most teachers of color felt called to the profession to improve schooling experiences for students of color, these added stressors clearly contribute to increased turnover (Dixon, Griffin, and Teoh, 2019). The toll of the invisible tax may also contribute to teachers leaving the workforce. When these issues are not addressed, they ultimately result in continued high rates of teacher turnover which

contribute to decreased teacher quality and undermine academic progress for our most vulnerable students (Will, 2020). Retaining teachers of color is a critical element in efforts to narrow the achievement gap and improve student outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To meaningfully increase the diversity of the teacher workforce, we cannot rely on diversity campaign efforts alone, more practical solutions must be done. North Carolina stands on the innovative edge to address these issues and convened the Developing a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education (DRIVE) Task Force. The task force assessed progress on creating and sustaining a diverse educator workforce and created a plan to strengthen and coordinate state efforts. The DRIVE Task Force has comprehensively addressed the full scope of issues related to diversity in the teacher workforce. The recommendation in this brief builds off of those to strengthen the teacher preparation pipeline, reduce debt accumulation, create supports to increase completion and strengthen efforts to retain educators of color. The following recommendations will allow policymakers focus on targeted policy solutions at these inflection points, that could provide some of the biggest impact on increasing and sustaining a diverse teacher workforce that reflects the students it serves.

STRENGTHEN THE TEACHER PREPARATION PIPELINE

- **Expand opportunities to enter the educator pipeline** so that prospective educators of color can make a selective choice into any program (whether traditional or alternative) that is best for their needs.
- **Provide sustainable investments to educator preparation programs at North Carolina’s Historically Minority Serving Institutions.** Since these institutions are the highest producer of teachers of color, investing and learning from these programs will be critical to increasing teacher diversity across the state.

- **Likewise, expand infrastructure within the educator preparation programs of predominantly white institutions,** enabling them to better collaborate with HBCUs in their shared responsibility to strengthen a skilled and diverse teacher pipeline.

REDUCE DEBT ACCUMULATION

- **Make postsecondary access affordable** by offering scholarships, loan forgiveness, and tuition reimbursement programs to reduce the burden of student debt for prospective educators of color. This could include strategies such as paying candidates during student teaching internships and offering additional stipends for living and learning during the first two years after being hired.

CREATE SUPPORTS TO INCREASE COMPLETION

- **Implement robust supports for certification exam preparation** so that educators of color can successfully become licensed after completing an educator program.
- **Create wrap-around services for teacher preparation programs** for educator candidates of color so that completion rates increase.

STRENGTHEN RETENTION EFFORTS

- **Strengthen support networks for educators of color** in order to create inclusive school environments that promote and value educators of color.
- **Invest in preparing, recruiting, and developing a non-white array of strong leaders** who are committed to positive working conditions for a non-white workforce.

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